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1733.

CONSIDERATIONS
ON THE
ADVANTAGE
OF
FREE PORTS,
UNDER CERTAIN REGULATIONS,
TO THE
NAVIGATION AND COMMERCE
OF THIS COUNTRY.



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P R E F A C E.

A NATION, whose prosperity so much depends on its commerce, and whose policy is ever directed to its extension, cannot be indifferent to a trade of such importance as that which is the subject of the present Essay.

And, as so many circumstances to favor its attainment have not concurred in any former Period, it is offered, not as the result of my own experience and observation on it in this and other countries only, but also as the collective judgement of the ablest merchants in each.

The substance of which was submitted to government soon after the close of the last war, at a time when official engagements did not leave me sufficient leisure to digest it, and afterwards it was farther suspended by circumstances, the last of which was the appearance of hostilities. But, as the object of these has been the more permanent establishment of peace, when that object shall be attained, that trade, of which it treats, will become the most effectual resource for those men whom the public exigence has called from their settled employments.

On

P R E F A C E.

On the deliberation of Merchants, whose judgement would stamp a credit on any commercial proposition, it has been referred to me to arrange it in the form in which it now appears. Its defects will, I trust, in part, be imputed to the extent and variety of objects it involves, and the expedience of compressing the whole within such limits as to keep the general principle always in sight, and, lastly, to a total want of precedent from which any aid could be derived.

The want alone of some system of the nature it proposes has been long known, but the means for supplying that want is now first attempted.

The encouragement, which the policy of this country gives to national improvements, will be my apology for soliciting the protection of it so far as its merit, on investigation, may appear to entitle it.

C O N-

CONSIDERATIONS, &c.

TO a minister, who has the prosperity of this country at heart, I am convinced no apology is necessary for the proposal of any matter calculated to benefit or extend its commerce.

Under this impression, I beg permission to recall your attention to a subject I have heretofore had the honour to submit to your consideration, which had then received the approbation of so many merchants here, as well as foreigners, that I am persuaded it would have met a more general support than any commercial regulation that has ever taken place; and as, on farther investigation, it has been equally approved, and by events, become more necessary, I hope it will be considered a sufficient ground for resuming the subject:

Which proposes an institution, conceived not only of great utility to the present commerce of this country, but expressly calculated for the acquisition of

B others,

others, of the greatest importance to a maritime nation, namely, the deposit and transit trade, in which this country, although the most capable of any in the universe, has hitherto made the least progress.

The reason has been, that so much of the revenue arises from the duties paid on foreign goods imported, although for the most part drawn back on exportation, yet the time of advance, and the expense and trouble of its recovery, have been sufficient to carry this trade to places where the like impediments do not exist, and who have availed themselves thereof without any other effort than the freedom of its admission.

This system is therefore calculated to comprehend all the properties of a free port necessary for this purpose, and to possess some advantages peculiar to itself, and to which there is nothing analogous in the world, on principles so obvious, that every merchant at the first view must clearly possess the subject.

And the regulations, few and practicable, viz.*

I. That the products of all countries, brought agreeably to our navigation laws, may be landed free.

* It is necessary to premise that the proposed regulations would not preclude or impede the present mode of importation, but is an optional alternative in many cases of the greatest utility in commerce, and most essential in that branch which is the subject of the present treatise.

II. That,

II. That, being entered and deposited in the proper warehouse, a transferable warrant be granted to the importer.

III. That such as are admissible for home consumption may be taken out on payment of the duties; and such as are for exportation reshipped on payment of the charge of deposit.

These are the principles, the apparent object of which is, the extension of the trade of this country, so far as practicable, without essentially infringing its existing laws or injuring its revenue, by removing the impediments which have hitherto obstructed it, and, in their place, to institute facilities, which neither this nor any other country does at present possess.

The principles explained, it will be scarce necessary to enumerate its effects, which must be visible to every man of mercantile experience.

And first, the immediate acquisition, or rather retention, of that deposit trade, now carried on in the neighbouring free ports for British account, where goods, subject to high duties here, are landed for the convenience of importing in small quantities for instant demand; where, besides the double freight and insurance, they are subject to a heavy train of expence and waste; and, in addition to those disadvantages,

vantages, forms the grand repository for smuggling, whence this country is deluged with such articles in contraband *.

To prevent the necessity of such interference, and to acquire a preference in the consignation of that surplus, productions of all countries which exceed their local demand, and are sent to a foreign market, are the objects here in contemplation.

* This more particularly applies to such articles as not only pay high duties, but require age before they are fit for consumption, such as wines and brandies; especially the latter, which at present can only be imported as wanted for use, compelling the merchant on this side, in case he avails himself of a good vintage or low market †, to pay a commission and every incident charge on his whole stock, with the possibility of adulteration by a mixture of inferior spirits.

And the only advantage he can possibly reap, against this injurious restraint, is the nefarious one of the sale of a part for smuggling into this country.

Whereas, could they be lodged here in the first instance, the duties on the whole of the best qualities would be secured, and the inferior would scarce be saleable for smuggling.

Independent of the encouragement this facility would be to legal importation, for the consumption of this country, a great share of that trade for the use of others might center here, now carried on by foreigners, for all the northern part of Europe, † from which this country is at present excluded: a national self-denial, for which no adequate reason can be assigned, if it be understood, that the proposed system is capable of an easy regulation, by which the smuggling any part so brought would be next to impossible, either inwards, or for exportation.

¶ Old brandies are now importing from Coniac at 270 ltrs. per 27 vts which cost originally 80 a 85. Since risen to upwards of 330.

† A foreign ship of six hundred tons burthen is now on the Thames, bound to Hamburgh, to load brandies for Russia.

And,

And, so sensible are foreigners that it would have this effect, that some merchants who reside in Ostend, and have also their establishments in Holland, have declared, that, should such a measure take place, they would directly remove to this country.

But still greater would be the consequence of this country becoming the greatest magazine of naval stores in the world; and that this would follow, the ablest merchants in that line here, as well as those resident in the countries of their growth, have given their decided opinions; the latter having expressed their belief, that, in case this port should be opened on such principles, there would be none of these articles left on their side after the shipping-season. And, although the present purpose is merely to shew the commercial advantage, yet it is impossible to separate the idea of its national importance in this instance.

To other trades it would be equally applicable, and its effects equally beneficial, the detail of which would exceed the limits of the present Essay;* and it

* Principle or theory is all that is attempted to be explained on a subject which, in its extent, refers to the trade of every other country. Their respective products, their imports and exports, together with their entrepots, or intermediate markets, in some of which the whole resting mercantile stock of the world are stored from their production to their consumption, and the freights, commissions, and charges, incident thereto, form the mercantile profit and that of its numerous dependents, and is the trade here recommended as the most appropriate to this country, and from which the greatest trading communities of the world have derived their consequence.

may be sufficient here to say, that, as this system is calculated to facilitate and to extend every kind of deposit and transit trade, the local situation of this island, independent of every other consideration, would render it the most eligible entrepot on the globe, for every part of Europe, America, the West Indies, the East Indies almost exclusively, the central point between the Mediterranean and the Levant, and the Baltic, Russia, and all parts of the frozen sea; added to its natural advantages, it could not fail of becoming such an additional source of national profit and employ of shipping as to render it well worthy the attention of the legislature.

The want of free ports in this country has been known and represented by some of the ablest statesmen and merchants, (even before those states had any existence, which have since, by their means, become the mercantile wonder of the world,) but hitherto no approach towards them has been made farther than the admission, from time to time, of some particular articles nearly on the principle *, sufficient perhaps

* A reference to the different acts, for the admission of divers articles under certain regulations, may be seen in the book of rates.

But, as these are, for the most part, such as are either the produce of countries dependent on this government, or such as are consumed in its manufactories, their effects are in aid of trades which are stationary here.

The drift of the proposed system is to acquire trade which is independent of this country and obstructed by impediments which it is calculated to remove. And it would be difficult to fix on any number of articles of import to which it would not be beneficial at times, yet to distinguish such as would be of the most immediate consequences is the primary object.

to shew the practicability and its utility in a partial degree.

But they amount not to a system of general benefit nor to attract the attention of other nations ; nothing for which any equivalent could be asked in their respective countries, which it is conceived might be the case was it complete, as, whatever profit this country might reap from it, the immediate concession is to foreigners, and so great as no treaty has ever ventured to hold forth, namely, the liberty of landing their merchandise in this country free, and the option of receiving their value at moderate and fixed rates whilst they remain.

What weight this would be in the scale of negotiation with other countries, in favor of the produce and manufacturers of this, is submitted to those in whose province it is, and it does not come within the scope of the present essay farther than is necessary to elucidate the positions it contains, and any instances, which could be selected from that mass which composes the whole export-trade of this country, would be very inadequate to decide.

Yet, as the commercial treaty with Spain has engaged the national attention so much, and as some of the most valuable manufactures of this country, and the best adapted to that, are prohibited there, it might probably be one among the many cases in which this concession,

concession, in favor of their exports, would be considered as more than equivalent to, and single instances could be referred to wherein it would have been a greater benefit to them than it would cost to open this port on those principles to all the world.

And as this is the basis on which the chief merit of this proposed regulation is founded, namely, its utility to other countries, and its consequential profit to this, it may be necessary to explain it by an example more in detail than its general outline has proposed.

And to this end the trade with Spain might be best selected, not only on account of the recent treaties as above-mentioned, but from the nature of the commerce of that country. The periodical arrivals of the produce of their distant and wide-extended colonies, subjecting them more to temporary glutted markets than any other, and the necessity of discharging the various obligations, payable on return of their ships, would render such a facility the most desirable; and so many known instances of this could be adduced as would far more than countervail the admission of such of our manufactures as are prohibited there.

But besides these prohibitions, it would remove the bar to a large and lucrative trade with that country.

try for deposit and spedition, of which this at present has no benefit.

The produce and manufactures of the East Country and Germany, for the consumption of New Spain, to a vast amount, might be gradually collected here for the equipment of their register-ships, to much greater advantage, in most cases, than in the hurry and uncertainty they are now got together, always at an advanced market; insomuch that it is a technical excuse in those countries for the high price of their goods, that the Spanish orders are in hand.

An evil which cannot be removed under the present mode, the reason for which might be assigned, but it would lead to a still greater extent of detail than is consistent with the present occasion.

And here the merits of the transferable warrant mentioned will appear, as they would enable the importers at all times to resort to the capital so invested; and, that this is not speculative, the use of equivalent documents on the East-India-company's prompts, and the latter payments on the national loans, may be adduced in point, and of what use they are in both cases I need not attempt to explain.

In this case the utility is equally obvious, where the object is to become the general depot for the products

C of

of other countries*, which, had this island been made the center of to the extent of which it is capable, the benefit, which would have been derived from it, may best be estimated by reference to its effects where it has been established.

The States of Holland alluded to, possessing no natural advantages, and innumerable obstacles to encounter; where the elements were to be separated and kept apart by incessant labour and expence; where the soil does not produce sufficient to feed the inhabitants; with few and inconsiderable manufacturers; with ports impracticable but by art†, and those shut

* As this facility is mentioned as peculiar to the system proposed, it may not be improper to shew one example of its operation, on the known principle, that the consignor draws two-thirds of the net value of the consignment of staple commodities on the consignee. Say,

	£. s. d.
On 100 tons of hemp, net value, £ 21. per ton, two-thirds amount to	— — — 1400 0 0
Duty on ditto, at 3s. 8d. per cwt.	— — — 366 13 4
Freight 30s. per ton, primage 10 per cent.	— — — 165 0 0
Insurance, commission, and other charges, relating till the sales are finished	— — — — —

To be immediately advanced by the consignee — 1931 13 4 on every 100 tons sent to him for sale, according to the present mode.

Whereas, by the proposed regulation, the two-thirds advance would be supplied by this warrant, (if necessary,) and the duty would be bonded, leaving the importer (at his option) to be in disburse for the freight and primage only, (£ 165,) every mercantile advantage remaining exactly the same; a facility which does not at present exist in the world.

† Large ships frequenting the port of Amsterdam are floated over the Pampus, a bank or bar on the Zuyder-zee, by large lighters, called *camels*, constructed for the purpose.

up

up during the winter months by frost; yet, by a systematical freedom of trade, admitting the ships and merchandise of all nations on nominal or small duties, they are become, and have long been, the principal magazine of Europe, being always provided with the products and merchandises of all countries, to profit on every demand, and, from their distressed origin, to have arisen to a degree of opulence surpassing every thing within our hemisphere.

This is perhaps the most favourable epoch for its introduction that ever has or will present itself, when the position of the British empire, at the close of the late war, had rendered it necessary to form new commercial treaties with almost every foreign power.

And the flames of war rekindled in both extremities of Europe, and the internal derangement of the intermediate countries, their usual entrepots, such as to seek a temporary asylum for their own property, in so much that some very considerable deposits are actually here for Russian account through the medium of Holland, &c. and it is impossible for an enlightened commercial nation, not to mark the singular opportunity to retain that trade which the hostilities of so many other nations conspire to press into this neutral country at the present time.

But the value of this trade is independent of any temporary circumstance, fixed on the principal of commerce

commerce itself; so long as the productions of different countries shall be mutually interchanged, the branch here described will be the most profitable part of such intercourse, inasmuch as it is exempt from the risk attendant on it through all its other gradations.

Nor is it conceived that any essential objection could be opposed to it under the intended modification, as it neither annihilates nor precludes any existing regulation, nor can it possibly injure the revenue, but secures it to a certainty, nor trenches on the interests of individuals dependent on the operations of commerce; but, on the contrary, they would be benefited in direct proportion to its increase; and, finally, it is in no case compulsory, but an optional auxiliary institution, affording additional and greater facilities than either this or any other country does at present possess.

The East-India-Company's imports bear the nearest affinity to it; the time allowed them for payment of duties to government, and the warrant issued by them to the buyers on payment for their goods, are similar and of what benefit these regulations are to that company are too well known to need any definition:

And, if found so essential in a trade, the inherent right of this country, how much more must they be in those to which we have no farther claim of preference

preference than what the superiority of the market will afford ; and this applies to the whole world independent of the dominions of Great Britain ; and the only difficulty which lies in the way, namely, the suspension of the duties, in some instances has been here surmounted altogether by means equally applicable to the present case, (if it should be found indispensable,) that is, by advancing so much of their capital to government at low interest as will secure the duties.

But in this case the goods themselves are responsible, and all the benefit the revenue could reap from the payment of the duties on such as are for exportation (the trade sought) is the interest on the duties whilst they remain, supposing the whole came immediately net into the Exchequer, † instead of its remaining (in part at least) in the different offices to pay drawbacks, to be recovered at an uncertain distant period, at an expence (exclusive of the advances in most cases exceeding the benefit the revenue can

† It appears, from sales of a number of principal articles, that the freight, commission, and charges, (profit in a national light,) exceed the interest on the duties for twelve months more than in the proportion of ten to one on the average ; and, with a few exceptions, still in a much greater ratio ; but, as this varies from article to article, no accurate statement can be made, nor should it seem necessary, if it be considered that this small occasional concession in point of revenue would be overbalanced, to a certainty, by the duties on the public sales it must necessarily occasion.

The insurance is not included in these charges, which, on foreign property, as it implies a risk nearly adequate, the profit cannot be ascertained.

receive

receive from it, and with an attendance and difficulty which have jointly effected the exclusion of that trade from this country *.

But it is here necessary to remark, that such goods as are for the immediate consumption of this country, and are usually kept in the merchants own warehouses for the inspection of customers, and to detail as wanted, they would probably for the most part pursue their usual method, and be little effected by the proposed regulation.

The benefit to be expected from which must be derived from the acquisition of trade, which at present takes a different direction, and consequently in which the revenue of this country is not interested, such as passes in the different ports of Germany, Holland, Flanders, France, &c. &c. and such as rests in the respective places of growth, too numerous to particularize, and from which it would be difficult to make any selection to convey an idea of the aggregate.

The article of naval stores may be considered amongst those of the greatest moment; and in the opinion of men, certainly the most capable to judge, this would become the principal magazine, to be ready for every demand, in preference to remaining

* The legal fees are very moderate, and the excess resorted to as the less evil to prevent greater delay and difficulty, a sort of agency practised by the different officers of the Custom-house.

frost-locked

frost-locked during two-thirds of the year in the different ports of Russia, Sweden, &c. *.

Any additional buildings, which an increase of importation may require, would be readily supplied without any charge to government, but on the contrary would spare the revenue a great part of the expence and trouble of attendance, where goods, now admitted on this principle, are housed, and whence the merchant frequently experiences a difficulty to collect them for shipping more than equal to the convenience; here they would be placed to the best advantage for sale or shipping, and, instead of their lying a dead stock, might become an active capital with equal facility as property in the funds.

A plan of a building adapted to this purpose was executed at the time by the surveyor of the city of London, which was esteemed to have done credit to the artist, although insufficient to contain the increase of imports, which would take place in this river only. †

* It is known that the capitals employed in this trade are fully adequate to the consumption of this country, and the occasional deposits now made.

But they are capable of great extension with equal advantage; and, by this means, not only the resting stock of those countries, but those of the whole world, might be received here with the same facility, and with this certain consequence, that the goods which would come here would consist in the excess of plentiful crops, generally of the best quality and low prices, which would insure a market.

† Sufficient Warehouses would be immediately supplied, for such an increase of importation, as to prove the efficacy of the proposed Measures to a certainty.

Of

Of this, perhaps, some idea may be formed, when it is considered that the new basons, lately added to the port of Ostend, contain additional quays, and warehouses of nearly equal extent, which fill as fast as finished.

This was calculated at about one hundred thousand tons; and, with inward and outward freight, would employ an equal quantity of shipping, and sailors in proportion; a consideration, it is presumed, sufficient to recommend a plan in favour of a description of men, and species of property, from whom this country has derived so much of its prosperity, and to whom it ever has and ever must recur for safety in times of war, when, by their service, having placed their country in a state of security, they are frequently left to become victims to the first moments of peace.

And, whatever respect I may owe to the judgement of others, to this point I may be allowed to speak from experience incident to few men.*

This would afford them an employ the most profitable to themselves and to their country, and such as has been held its true policy. Mr. Addison speaks so directly to this point as cannot be so well expressed as in his own words:

* This refers to a circumstance in the late war, of great moment at the time, the particulars of which it is not necessary, and perhaps improper, to state here.

“ Several

“ Several authors have written on the advantage
“ of trade in general, which indeed is so copious a
“ subject, that it is impossible to exhaust it in a short
“ discourse, so it is very difficult to observe any
“ thing new upon it.

“ I shall therefore only consider trade, in this paper,* as it is absolutely necessary, and essential to the safety, strength, and prosperity, of our own nation.

“ In the first place, as we are an island, accommodated on all sides with convenient ports, and encompassed with navigable seas, we should be inex-
“ cusable if we did not make these blessings of Providence and advantages of nature turn to their proper account.

" Besides, as an island, it has not been thought
" agreeable to the true British policy to make ac-

* Vide Freeholder, No. 42.

“quisitions on the continent ; in lieu, therefore, of
 “such an increase of dominion, it is our business to
 “extend to the utmost our trade and navigation ;
 “by this means we reap the advantage of conquest
 “without violence or injustice; we not only strengthen
 “ourselves, but we gain the wealth of our neigh-
 “bours in an honest way, and, without any act of
 “hostility, lay the several nations of the world
 “under a kind of contribution.”

And what he adds more immediately to this purpose;

“That, by extending a well regulated trade, we
 “are as great gainers by the commodities of many
 “other countries as by those of our own nation ;
 “and, by supplying foreign markets with the growth
 “and manufactures of the most distant regions, we
 “receive the same profit for them as if they were
 “the produce of our own island.” To this au-
 thority others might be added to shew the preference
 of such an extension of trade to an increase of territory ;
 and, on investigation, it would appear that there are
 few articles of produce but would yield a greater pro-
 fit by this means than the value of the soil on which
 they grew, supposing it could be attained and pre-
 served without expence or bloodshed.*

* From the variety, it would be an operation of great length to shew the average proportion the profit, on this trade, bears to the value of the goods themselves ; from a specimen, it appears to be about 20 per cent. or one-fifth of the value of the produce, free from the expence of the establishment, protection, and cultivation, of the soil, the failure of crops, and every other casualty and expence incident to their growth.

To

To this species of trade it is that the States of Holland, and all the free ports in the world, owe their existence; whilst this country, possessing the means superior to any in the universe, has hitherto not profited in any proportion to its ability; to the extension of which this plan is directed; and, that it would effect it, I have the coincident judgement of the first merchants living in support of my own conviction, founded on my own observations, on the spot, in most of the ports and places to which it has any allusion.

And it is demonstrable, that the acquisition of so much of it as would occupy a space, equal to this single building, would in all its consequences produce a national profit, more than equal to that of the Bank of England, with this difference, that the one arises from the moneyed property of this and other countries, whilst this would be derived from the freight of ships wanting employ, from insurance, commissions, and other mercantile charges, without any additional capital worth the mentioning.

Exclusive of its effects on our own products and manufactures, from an increased influx of property and the resort of merchants, this, although not subject to calculation, is so obvious, and so confirmed by universal experience, where great marts have been established.

D 2 To sum

To shew more distinctly the profit arising from this trade, pro-forma accounts might be added, whence it would appear that the freight, insurance, commissions, and all charges of merchandise, (duties excepted,) amount, for six months, from about £. 3 per ton to upwards of triple that sum, according to the species of goods, the length of the voyage, &c. on the imports only; but, as the variation is so great, the transcript would exceed the present limits; and it may be enough to know, that these charges (on comparison) are as low or lower than those of other countries, to give a decided preference to this where every other circumstance is so much in its favour: and this may be proved by every merchant on reference to his own sales, and by those furnished by his correspondents from abroad.

But it may be unnecessary to multiply proofs in favour of a trade which has enriched every country in the proportion as they have possessed it; one of the first, in point of magnitude, and singular in the property of being free from the risk incident to almost every other species of commerce.

To those I have the honour of addressing, I am sensible less than has been advanced would have been sufficient to explain this subject; to others more description may be necessary to make it understood, and do away certain difficulties which generally present themselves on the first view of this business, namely, that any withholding of duties must

must prejudice the revenue; and secondly, that a regulation of so extensive effects implies great and novel operations.

Whereas every effect this system can produce must ultimately be in favour of the revenue, and its whole regulation consists in the retrenching the heavy unnecessary advance, and the tedious and expensive operations, which have so long precluded this country from that invaluable trade.



2. *adult* *birds* ; *however* *old* *epithelial* *flame*
hairs *every* *epithelial* *efflux* *extreme* *old* *noisily*
adult *birds* *lemon*

